

# Iwaidja language

**Iwaidja**, in phonemic spelling *Iwaja*, is an Australian aboriginal language of the Iwaidja people with about 150 speakers in northernmost Australia. Historically from the base of the Cobourg Peninsula, it is now spoken on Croker Island. It is still being learnt by children.

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## Phonology

### Consonants

Iwaidja has the following 20 consonants.

	Peripheral		Laminal	Apical	
	Bilabial	Velar	Postalveolar	Alveolar	Retroflex
<u>Nasal</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>ŋ</u>	<u>ɲ</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>ɳ</u>
<u>Plosive</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>k</u>	<u>c</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>ʈ</u>
<u>Approximant</u>	<u>w</u>	<u>ɣ</u>	<u>j</u>		<u>ɭ</u>
<u>Flap</u>					<u>ɽ</u>
<u>Trill</u>				<u>r</u>	
<u>Lateral</u>			<u>(ɭ)</u>	<u>l</u>	<u>ɭ</u>
<u>Lateral flap</u>			<u>(ɭ̥)</u>	<u>ɭ</u>	<u>ɭ̥</u>

Note: The postalveolar lateral and lateral flap are rare, and it cannot be ruled out that they are sequences of /lj/ and /ɭj/. The plosives are allophonically voiced, and are often written b

Iwaidja	
<b>Native to</b>	Australia
<b>Region</b>	Croker Island, Northern Territory
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Iwaidja people
<b>Native speakers</b>	123 (2016 census) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Language family</b>	Iwaidjan <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Iwaidjic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Warrkbi<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Iwaidja</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Writing system</b>	Latin script
Language codes	
<b>ISO 639-3</b>	ibd
<b>Glottolog</b>	iwai1244 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/iwai1244</span> ) <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>AIATSIS</b> <sup>[3]</sup>	N39 ( <span>https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/N39</span> )

d ɟ ʃ g.

## Vowels

Iwaidja has three vowels, /a, i, u/. The following table shows the allophones of the vowels as described by Pym and Larrimore<sup>[4]</sup>.

Vowel	Allophone	Environment
/i/	[i:]	Occurs before laminal consonants.
	[e]	Occurs word initially.
	[i]	All other cases.
/a/	[ai]	Occurs before laminal consonants.
	[æ]	Occurs following laminal consonants except utterance final. Free variation with [a] in this environment.
	[au]	Occurs before /w/. Free variation with [a] in this environment.
	[a]	All other cases.
/u/	[ui]	Occurs before laminal consonants.
	[o]	Occurs following velar consonant. Free variation with [u] in this environment.
	[u]	All other cases.

## Morphophonemics

Iwaidja has extensive morphophonemic alternation. For example, body parts occur with possessive prefixes, and these alter the first consonant in the root:

ŋa-lɟuli	aŋ-kuli	ɪuli
<i>my foot</i>	<i>your foot</i>	<i>his/her foot</i>

Both the words *arm* and *to be sick* originally started with an /m/, as shown in related languages such as Maung. The pronominal prefix for *it*, *its* altered the first consonant of the root. In Iwaidja, this form extended to the masculine and feminine, so that gender distinctions were lost, and the prefix disappeared, leaving only the consonant mutation—a situation perhaps unique in Australia, but not unlike that of the Celtic languages.

	<i>arm</i>	<i>to be sick</i>
<i>they</i>	a-mawur "their arms"	a-macu "they're sick"
<i>he/she/it</i>	pawur "his/her arm"	pacu "s/he's sick"

## Semantics

The Iwaidja languages are nearly unique among the languages of the world in using verbs for kin terms. Nouns are used for direct address, but transitive verbs in all other cases. In English something similar is done in special cases: *he fathered a child*; *she mothers him too much*. But these do not indicate social

relationships in English. For example, *he fathered a child* says nothing about whether he is the man the child calls "father". An Iwaidja speaker, on the other hand, says *I nephew her* to mean "she is my aunt". Because these are verbs, they can be inflected for tense. In the case of in-laws, this is equivalent to *my ex-wife* or *the bride-to-be* in English. However, with blood relations, past can only mean that the person has died, and future only that they are yet to be born.

a	-pana	-maɽjarwu	-n
<i>I-to-him</i>	future	<i>am father to</i>	noun
"my future son" (lit. "I will be his father")			

ɪi	-maka	-ntuŋ
<i>he-to-her</i>	<i>is husband to</i>	past
"his ex/late wife" (lit. "he was husband to her")		

## Notes

1. "Census 2016, Language spoken at home by Sex (SA2+)" ([http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS\\_C16\\_T09\\_SA](http://stat.data.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ABS_C16_T09_SA)). *stat.data.abs.gov.au*. ABS. Retrieved 2017-10-30.
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Iwaidja" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/iwai1244>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. N39 (<https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/N39>) Iwaidja at the Australian Indigenous Languages Database, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
4. Pym, Noreen, and Bonnie Larrimore. Papers on Iwaidja phonology and grammar. Series A Vol. 2., 1979.

## References

- Nicholas Evans, 2000. "Iwaidjan, a very un-Australian language family." In *Linguistic Typology* 4, 91-142. Mouton de Gruyter.

## External links

- DOBES documentation of endangered languages, Iwaidja (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070914014759/http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES/projects/iwaidja/languages/view?searchterm=Iwaidja>)
- OLAC resources in and about the Iwaidja language (<http://www.language-archives.org/language/ibd>)
- Crowd-sourcing and Language documentation: Ma! Iwaidja phrasebook and dictionary iPhone App (<http://www.paradisec.org.au/blog/2012/09/crowd-sourcing-and-language-documentation-september-lip/>)

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**This page was last edited on 3 December 2019, at 10:46 (UTC).**

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